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LEARNING ENGLISH AS A THIRD LANGUAGE

“THE CASE OF THE ROMANIAN COMMUNITY IN SPAIN”

Autor

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Learning English as a third language.

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INTRODUCTION

The spread of English in Europe as the most important language of wider communication has been a powerful promoter of both societal and individual bilingualism and multilingualism, being in Europe at least, a new phenomenon. Likewise, the linguistic landscape in Spain has also undergone significant changes (Cenoz & Gurter, 2006). Since trilingualism is bound to be a common situation in Spain, in this project our principle concern is to outline the current situation of the Castellon province, where the growing number of immigrant communities particularly from Eastern European countries, has drawn our attention to a linguistic phenomenon and language behavior worthy of research.

Therefore this research proposal is an attempt to analyse the acquisition of English as a third language, as a target language that has a foreign language status, in the context of Romanian immigrants in the Castellian province, who learn the official language of the new country where they reside and then acquire English as a third language in a formal educational context.

On that account, our paper considers how this newly established community in Spain uses the strategies involved while learning Spanish and how the two language systems influence each other. Moreover, it deals with cross-linguistic influence in learning English, and how the process and production of acquiring the Spanish language potentially influence the acquisition of the third language. In tackling these issues the first part will refer to the theoretical background underlying this present research proposal, focusing later on the case of Romanian community. In doing so, the first part aims to present a description of the third language acquisition phenomenon in Europe, referring here to previous studies dealing with bilingualism effect on third language acquisition, the subject of English as a third language is also included and moreover are considered the factors that intervene in the process of cross-linguistic influence in third language acquisition. Secondly, we move on to define the features of the bilingual framework in which is involved the Romanian community within the process of becoming bilingual speakers after being immersed in the Spanish target-language culture and we will also try to illustrate particular cross-linguistic transfer examples along the development of trilingual competence with English.

1. THIRD LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

The spread of English as a lingua franca in Europe has promoted the acquisition of English language as a second language for a large number of Europeans, but there are many situations where it is learned as a third language.

In order to study how learners acquire a language, a clear, operational definition of what is meant by the term “acquisition” is needed. First, some researchers, such as Krashen (1981), distinguish between “acquisition” and “learning”. The former refers to the subconscious process of “picking up” a language through exposure and the latter to the conscious process of studying it. According to this view, it is possible for learners “to acquire” or “to learn” rules independently and at separate times. Third language acquisition research has experienced important developments in recent years (Cenoz and Genesee, 1998; Cenoz and Jessner, 2000; Maria Pilar Safont, 2005; Hufeisen and Lindeman 1998). The interest in TLA has sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic foundations. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the spread of English in the world, the increasing mobility of the world population and the recognition of minority languages have resulted in social and educational situations in which learning more than two languages is not exceptional. On the other hand, from a psycholinguistic perspective, third language acquisition research presents specific characteristics derived from the fact that third language learners are experienced learners and also because bilingual and multilingual individuals present a different type of competence as compared to that of monolinguals (Grosjean, 1992; Cook, 1995; Jessner, 1998)

Third language acquisition is a very common phenomenon all over the world, in natural as well as formal contexts. It takes place in a large number of diverse sociolinguistic situations. In European countries there are established linguistic minorities that have achieved status and support for their languages. For instance in the Netherlands, Spain and Finland, language policies include bilingual programs as well as foreign language programs which encourage the acquisition of a third language starting at primary school level. This can be the case with Catalan in the Valencian Community, which is officially considered a bilingual area where both Catalan and Castilian are employed.

At the same time, in the countries of European Union, new minorities are becoming established, frequently forming sizeable bilingual communities. In both cases, the third language acquisition almost invariably is English, in all acquisition contexts English is associated with being the language that has the greatest international currency, and that makes it a useful and often also desirable language to learn. Because of this characteristic, it has a different standing from that of any other foreign language that may be acquired, and its acquisition will be facilitated by the ubiquity of English, often in attractive contexts. There are differences with regard to the status of English in

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different acquisition contexts which may have an effect on the learner's motivation, and ultimately to their attained proficiency. In European settings English is simply the foreign language par excellence, but a distinction can be drawn as in the northern parts of Europe the English language has acquired a higher profile than in the countries with Romance languages, where English has been expanding at a slower rate.

1.1. Literature background on the effect of bilingualism in third language acquisition

There is a growing body of research into third language acquisition and multilingualism which is reflected in a number of recent publications in this area (for instance, Cenoz, Hufeissen, & Jessner, 2001a; Cenoz & Jessner, 2000; Quay, 2001, Safont, 2005). This research responds to the need to identify the specific characteristics that distinguish third language acquisition from second language acquisition and multilingualism from bilingualism.

In the research on the effect of bilingualism on third language acquisition, most studies on the monolingual-bilingual distinction confirm the idea that bilingual learners present advantages when learning an additional language in comparison to monolingual learners (Cenoz, 2003). One might mention, in support of this idea, some studies on the acquisition of French by bilingual immigrants and monolingual speakers of the national language, such as those by Thomas (1988), Bild and Swain (1989) and Brohy (2001), conducted in the United States, Canada and Switzerland, respectively. These authors' analyses indicated that general ability in French was found to be superior in the case of bilingual learners. More evidence to support the advantages of bilingualism can be found in the findings from the investigation on the acquisition of English in Spain (Cenoz, 1991, 1996; Cenoz & Valencia, 1994; Lasagabaster, 1998, 2000; Sanz, 2000). These are studies conducted in bilingual communities (The Basque Country and Catalonia) in which the target language has a foreign language status, and monolingual and bilingual learners differ as far as the instruction language at school. Monolingual students are instructed via the majority language of the community (Spanish), whereas bilingual students receive schooling through the minority language of the community (Basque or Catalan). Bilingualism turned out to be a factor which predicted better general proficiency in English irrespective of other factors, such as intelligence, age, exposure or motivation. An important contribution to the field of pragmatic competence of third language learners in a bilingual foreign language setting was brought by Safont (2005) in a study where it is addressed the question of a possible positive effect of bilingualism on communicative sensitivity by focusing on a specific area of pragmatic competence, the speech act of requesting. She provides data from another area of Spain, Valencia, where Catalan and Spanish are spoken, and she compares the pragmatic awareness and pragmatic production of monolingual Spanish speaking students and bilingual Catalan-Spanish students. The results of her study provide evidence of the positive effect of bilingualism on third language acquisition.

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The cognitive advantages of bilingualism such as a wider linguistic repertoire, enhanced learning strategies, cognitive flexibility and metalinguistic awareness and the development of enhanced linguistic processing strategies may help explain this positive effect of bilingualism on acquiring a third language (Cenoz, 2000, 2003). Clyne (2004) found multiple positive, social, cultural and cognitive advantages to trilingualism. Such trilinguals were found to be effective and persistent language learners, whose bilingualism is a language apprenticeship for further language learning. They conclude that acquiring a third language at school boosts students' confidence in their bilingualism and makes them appreciate their home language more, in some cases even leading to a desire to maintain their heritage language in the future and pass it to the next generation. Clyne (2004) also found that acquisition of a third language awakens and deepens interest in other languages, cultures and countries, creating more multicultural and global citizens.

However, the number of investigations that show no statistical differences between monolingual and bilingual behaviour also deserves consideration (e.g. Balke-Aurell & Lindblad, 1982; Jaspaert & Lemmens, 1990; Sanders & Meijers, 1995; Schoonen et al., 2002). Some studies comparing the degree of proficiency achieved in the third language acquisition by bilingual immigrant students and majority language students have reported no differences in English as a third language when they compared monolingual Dutch speakers and bilingual immigrant students who had Turkish or Moroccan Arabic as their first language.

On that score, Cenoz (2003) points out that the studies in which bilingual learners present no advantages usually involve, in the terms of Lambert (1974), “subtractive” contexts, which are those environments where the first language is not valued and the learning of the second language replaces the first one. She also suggests that bilingual learners show more advantages when dealing with general aspects of L3 proficiency than when coping with very specific aspects of language competence.

Regarding the specific area of phonology, facilitating effect of bilingualism on third language acquisition is not so evident. An example supporting this view is Gonzalez Ardeo's study (2001) who analysed the pronunciation in English by 12 monolingual (Spanish) and 36 bilingual (Basque/Spanish) university students who read an English passage aloud. Both error countings on a series of categories (vowels, consonants, consonant clusters) and intelligibility judgement ratings indicated that there were no statistical differences between monolinguals and bilinguals.

In light of the mixed results coming from these studies with regard to the relationship between additional language acquisition and bilingualism, we cannot but agree with the assertion of Cenoz

(2003:80) that “third language acquisition is a complex process that can be affected by many factors and therefore it is not possible to provide a simple explanation to account for the results of the studies.” The most satisfactory conclusion we can come to is that bilingualism, at worst, does not hinder the learning of other languages and, at best, exerts a positive influence.

1.2. Acquiring English as a third language

Research on trilingualism and multilingualism has seen significant growth in the last decade which reflects awareness of the need to conceptually set apart trilingualism from bilingualism

The acquisition of English as a third language shares many characteristics with the acquisition of English as L2 but it also presents differences. Third language acquisition of English is a more complex phenomenon than second language acquisition (SLA) because, apart from all the individual and social factors that affect the latter, the process and product of acquiring a second language can themselves potentially influence the acquisition of a third.

The processes used in TLA may be very similar to those used by L2 learners but, as Clyne (1997:113) points out “the additional language complicates the operations of the processes”.

Third language learners have more experience at their disposal than the second languages ones do, and have been found to present more strategies and a higher level of metalinguistic awareness (Jasone Cenoz and Ulrike Jessner, 2000). Third language learners have already acquired two other languages, either simultaneously or consecutively, as first or first and second languages. Therefore the knowledge of these two languages and the experience of the acquisition process of another language are likely to influence the acquisition of a third language (Jasone Cenoz and Charlotte Hoffmann, 2003).

The acquisition of English as a third language also raises issues such as the contextual and linguistic factors influencing multilingual and linguistic competence. According to Cenoz (2000) we need to consider the contextual setting where these languages are learned and used and also the linguistic typology and the sociocultural status of the languages involved. The contextual factors refer to the use of L1, L2 and L3 in both instructional and natural setting contexts or in either a natural context or a formal educational context. It is believed that this aspect will influence the development of learner’s spoken and written communicative production as it is deeply dependent on the quality and quantity of the target language input.

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Research on multilingualism acquisition has shown that the relationship between languages being learned as far as linguistic typology is concerned, constitutes another factor affecting third language acquisition. Linguistic typology has proved to be influential in the choice of the source languages. Speakers borrow more terms from the language that is typologically closer to the target language, or the language that is perceived as typologically closer

(Cenoz, 2001). Whereas, according to Ringbom, (1987) it has also been suggested that transfer is more likely from the first language than from later-learned languages, these effects seem to be less powerful than typological similarity between the languages, as there is evidence for cross-linguistic transfer in multilingual acquisition when the languages involved are similar with respect to phonetic structure, vocabulary and syntax (Mohle, 1989; Singleton, 1987, Cenoz, 1998).

Less frequently discussed in the literature are instances of transfer of meaning between non –native languages. According to Ringbom (1986:15) transfer of meaning may be restricted to the native language, as this type of influence requires “considerable fluency and automatisation in the language from which transfer takes place”. He further observes that transfer of meaning could also occur from a second language, provided the learner’s proficiency level is sufficiently advanced. Between two typologically close languages, having the role of the interlanguage and target language, evidence of transfer of form is more likely than evidence of transfer of meaning.

The educational aspects of the acquisition of English as a third language differs from those of English as a second language, too, and have more implications regarding the optimal age for the introduction of different languages and the desired level of proficiency in each.

Also according to Jasone Cenoz and Ulrike Jessner (2000) another distinction between the acquisition of an L2 and L3 is related to terminology. In talking about L1 and L2 it is implicitly assumed that L1 is the dominant language and that the level of proficiency in L2 must necessarily be lower than in L1. When a third language is acquired, however, the chronological order in which the three languages have been learned does not necessarily correspond to the frequency of use or by the level of competence in the trilingual speaker.

The sociocultural context in which languages are learned affects the acquisition of a third language as reported by Safont (2005) because in most multicultural societies languages have different status, role and are used for different functional purposes. Nunan and Lam (1998) has proposed four educational programmes based on languages cultural and educational position in a society, promoting or not the multicultural acquisition and use.

1.3. Cross-linguistic influence in third language acquisition

Since the effects of one language on the other or others represent a much more complex issue in TLA than in SLA, studies of cross-linguistic influence have turned out to be of major importance for the field. Regarding CLI in third language acquisition Ringbom (1986) noted that “it is obvious that the less the learner knows about the target language, the more he is forced to draw upon any other prior knowledge he possesses. This other language also includes other foreign languages previously learned, like L1 influence, will be much more in evidence at the early stages of learning.

A factor to be considered in the analysis of CLI is the level of proficiency.

As argued by Grosjean (1985), learners’ proficiency is commonly evaluated not by accounting for the learners’ particular needs and usage, but from the prospective of a native-like monolingual competence. Both in the foreign and in the second language learning context, very few instances are found of second language learners who have achieved proficiency level similar to that of a monolingual native speaker of the target language. Furthermore, as pointed out by various authors (Cenoz and Genesee 1998, Edwards, 1994) bilinguals equally competent in their own two languages are almost non-existent.

Additionally, the level of bilingualism seems to be a variable which has an influence on the degree of proficiency in the target language, when the learner has a high level of competence in the L2 and if the L2 has been acquired and used in natural situations. Evidence to support this affirmation can be found in some investigations conducted in bilingual communities in Spain on the acquisition of English as a foreign language, all of which insist on the beneficial influence of balanced bilingualism on third language acquisition. They all seem to confirm, as Cenoz (2003) states, the relevance of the Cummins (1976) “threshold hypothesis”, which associates a high level of bilingual proficiency with positive cognitive effects, and the importance of the Cummins (1991) “interdependence hypothesis”, which assumes that academic proficiency can be transferred between languages, in third language acquisition too.

In light of these investigations’ results, different factors related to the level of bilingualism, such as receiving school instruction in the minority language (Lasagabaster, 1998), a higher frequency of use of the minority language (Sagasta, 2001), a better competence in the minority language (Bernaus, 1996) or a higher proficiency in both the minority and the majority language (Muñoz, 2000), happen to be related to better outcomes in different dimensions of L3 English. Additionally, the positive effect of higher levels of bilingual proficiency on L3 competence has been found to be greater in older than in younger school learners, which suggests that the cognitive advantages associated with the level of bilingualism increase as a function of age (Lasagabaster, 1998).

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Another factor that has proved to be influential in the choice of the source language is the linguistic typology. Typological distance, especially when comparing L1 and L2 to L3, has been found to affect third language acquisition. Learners of English who speak a language typologically similar to the target language tend to transfer vocabulary and structures from that language rather than their first language and achieve a significantly better acquisition of the third language than bilinguals who do not have a language typologically close to the L3 in their linguistic background (Balke-Aurell & Lindblad, 1982; Swain et al, 1990). However, there are also cases in which the superiority shown by bilinguals who speak a language typologically related to the target language has not always reached statistical significance (Bild & Swain, 1989).

Other researchers have looked at differences with regard to some aspects of the acquisition of the first language in bilingual immigrant subjects, and the effect of these differences on the acquisition of a third language. It has been discovered, for instance, that bilinguals who have learned their home language formally are better L3 learners than those bilingual speakers who have acquired their L1 only informally at home, as they have been found to perform significantly better on L3 tests and to be able to avoid interference and exploit positive transfer to a larger extent (Thomas, 1985, 1988). Similarly, immigrants who are literate in both the home and the national language happen to be more accurate in the L3 than those bilingual speakers who are illiterate in their heritage language (Swain et al., 1990). In contrast, Balke-Aurell and Lindblad (1982) discovered that those bilingual children who always spoke the national language at home, but knew their home language passively, obtained L3 higher scores than the learners who actively used their first language at home.

Another factor that can potentially affect cross-linguistic influence is “regency”. It is believed that learners are more likely to borrow from a language they actively use than from other languages they may know but do not use.

BILINGUALISM WITHIN THE ROMANIAN COMMUNITY IN SPAIN

Taking into account that in this project the purpose is to shed light on the situation of the Romanian learners in Spain who become bilingual speakers after being immersed in the Spanish target-language culture, we will consider the notions of bilingualism and bilingual competence.

We will attempt to narrow down the concept of bilingualism and define the bilingual competence focusing on a specific bilingual community (Hoffman, 1991). The definition provided by Skutnabb-Kangas (1984:90) refers to immigrants while describing bilingualism: “ A bilingual speaker is someone who is able to function in two (or more) languages, either in monolingual or bilingual communities, in accordance with the sociocultural demands made of an individual’s communicative and cognitive competence by these communities or by the individual herself, at the same level as native speakers, and who is able positively to identify with both (or all) language groups (and cultures) or parts of them.”

2.1. General characteristics of the Romanian community in Spain. Similarities between the Spanish and Romanian language

Migration movements into Europe have a variety of background and forms, uneven development and political instability, but, at the same time, availability and affordability of new communication media and transport have generated greater migration pressures and supply driven migration movements. Before 1990, the communist system of supervising its citizens’ circulation abroad reduced Romanian international migration to Spain to accidental cases. Thus, when discussing Romanian migration to Spain, we make references to movements of people to this destination after 1990 and we can witness a permanent growth mainly in the last decade.

Immigration and integration are two processes that cannot be separated, the second always following the other and being one of the greatest concerns not only for migrants but also for the host societies. Integration of immigrants is also one of Europe’s most important challenges over the next decade. We will refer to the Romanian minority taking into account the cultural integration as a defining component of the process, being described as the process of cognitive, cultural, behavioural and attitudinal change that concerns both the immigrants and the settlement society as well. Romanian immigrants must improve language skills and gain social confidence in order to blend seamlessly into the host society. Since immigrating to Spain is a very recent phenomenon, we cannot speak about a numerous second generation of Romanians needing to be educated in Spain, still many schools have a specialist teacher to help immigrant children of all nationalities to learn Spanish.

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Normally, the younger the child, the more quickly they learn the language and integrate. In this framework, an important element is social integration, as it refers to the membership of immigrants to the private sphere. There are many factors that play a crucial role for social integration, such as labour insertion, educational enrolment, social intercourse, friendship, marriages and voluntary associations of Romanians with Spanish. We also have to consider the identification integration which refers to the membership in a new society, to the feelings of belonging and identification. Immigrants do not only differ in the educational background, vocational qualification and regional traditions from the new society, but also the experience of migration, settlement and adjustment, changed their socio-economic position, their cultural orientations, turning them into a new group that combines aspects of both foreign and native identities.

There are preparatory policies meant to smooth the integration. In order to contribute to their integration Romanians have to learn how to adjust to the rules of the host country, Spain, how to function in society as effectively as a native would. Because of the reported notions of a shared “Latinidad”, Romania shares values and cultural aspect with the receiving communities which facilitate the complex process of integration and give a particular linguistic turn to the experience of Romanian migration to Spain.

At the same time, immigration mobilises laypeople’s awareness of language. Language and culture are two sides of the same coin. Culture is defined as a cluster of attributes, such as values, beliefs, behaviour patterns and symbols unique to a particular human group. Language establishes the bond between individuals and between individuals and groups and also provides a medium for transmitting group values, beliefs and attitudes.

Any discussion of bilingualism and the bilingual learner must also take into consideration the individual learner. As Romanians learn Spanish language they also learn through language about relationships and social structures. They began to learn about the new culture into which they develop. It is through language, in the everyday interactions with the family, peers and school, that culture is transmitted to the person. In this context the learner’s sense of identity develops and language is central to this process.

When immigrants begin to learn a new language, comparisons between mother tongue and a new language are inevitable. If learning occurs simultaneously with entering a new language community, speakers become sensitive to the cultural and social implications that multilingualism involves.

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Romanian and Spanish are both Romance languages and they have shared Latin roots. Even though Romanian has obvious grammatical and lexical similarities with Spanish, it is not mutually intelligible to a practical extent; Romanian speakers will usually need some formal study of basic grammar and vocabulary before being able to understand even the simplest sentences in Spanish (and vice-versa).

In a study done by the linguist Mario Pei in 1949, which analysed the evolutionary degree of languages in comparison to their inheritance language (in the case of Romance languages to Latin comparing phonology, inflection, discourse, syntax, vocabulary and intonation), revealed a percentage of 23,5% in the case of Romanian and 20% in the case of Spanish language.

According to the “interdependence hypothesis” there is a positive and significant relationship between students’ first language development, especially their development of literacy skills, and their second language development (Cummins, 1981). In the same way, Romanians second language acquisition is positively dependent on the level and nature of the learners’ proficiency in their first language.

We can distinguish between “ascribed” and “achieved” bilingualism (Adler, 1977) among the Romanians living in Spain. School or learned Spanish provides a basic reference point for sentence construction, vocabulary, pronunciation. However the contextual demands promote an ascribed Spanish bilingualism, which is produced according to how the pragmatic and social conditions change. Therefore, Romanians learn Spanish formally (through instruction), naturally (outside school) or by a combination of instruction and natural acquisition.

We can say that as Romanian and Spanish language are typologically close to one another will facilitate the acquisition of the second language, as the learners’ mother tongue is regarded as an important factor affecting second language acquisition (Corder, 1978; Hatch, 1983). The similarity may also concern cultural factors connected with the languages and linguistic communities involved (Chumbow, 1981).

There are lexical similarities between Spanish and the Romanian language ranging from 55% to 60%, related enough to be mutually intelligible in both languages, because of the shared origins derived from Latin. Vocabulary is not the only attribute romance languages have in common; they also share many grammatical similarities.

Both languages have similar word order, for example, in most cases the adjective comes after the noun both in Spanish and in Romanian. Nouns have different genders and the corresponding adjectives agree with those genders.

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The dreaded but all important Subjunctive tense is used in both languages the same verbal tenses are conjugated in much the same way and Spanish syntax generally follows the subject verb object pattern the same as Romanian. Equally, the concept of having two different ways of addressing someone using “you”-polite and familiar will be well known to anyone with even the most rudimentary knowledge of Romanian and Spanish. Another common characteristic in both languages is the dropping in many occasions of the pronouns and the stress patterns that are usually the same in similar –sounding words. The differences in grammar are minor and we need to concentrate mostly on differences in pronunciation, idioms and vocabulary.

Cummings (1976) stands that bilingual students have superior thinking abilities than monolinguals, based on their dual linguistic systems. The presence of the growing number of immigrants in Spain has had a clear impact on the education system. Nevertheless, while bilingualism receives support and encouragement, the maintenance of immigrant languages are the object of an intense debate and the question of whether these languages should be supported by the public school system is at the heart at the debate. So far, the tendency has been towards assimilation to the majority language through the implementation of compensatory programs that help fix their language “deficit”.

Soriano Ayala (2000) has suggested five phases in the response given to the Spanish educational system to the theme of cultural pluralism (“diversity”). The first one is the “assimilationist” model, where the objective is that the children from minority groups quickly learn the language of the majority and become assimilated into the culture of the majority group in the best way possible. The second one would be the “compensatory” phase. The aim is for children of other cultures to overcome any gaps or deficiencies arising from their ethnic origins, so that they may join the culture of the dominant group. A third phase would be the “corrective “model response to diversity. In this phase the aim is to eliminate cases of discrimination and prejudice toward ethnic “multicultural” model, where minority cultures are recognized as having equal rights with respect to the majority. Within this model “multiculturalism defends a symmetrical interchange and seeks to establish communication between cultures...in equality and respect for differences” The last response presented by Soriano Ayala is the “intercultural” model. Here the goal is to establish a new culture based on the interchange of cultures, values, experiences, and so forth. According to her, “intercultural” education should give high value to cultural differences as a source of enrichment, and should work in terms of difference and not of inequality”. Although the scholarly literature proposes “intercultural education” as the best model in the treatment of diversity, studies show that schools still favour the assimilationist phase of education linked to compensatory phase. As Cummins (1997) has pointed out, although practice should inform theory and the other way around, reality is never that way because there are great difficulties for multicultural education policies to filter down to the classroom.

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Within the Spanish education system, intercultural education is the new framework to manage the increasing presence of immigrant students in schools, and the European schools. The introduction of education in the immigrant student's languages of origin is among these principles. As a result the Education Ministry approved projects on teaching classes of Romanian language, culture and civilization in Spanish schools, mainly in regions where the Romanian communities are well represented. The pilot projects will consist in introducing the educational offering for extra-curriculum classes, two hours per week, in all forms of education up to high –school. The classes will teach basic notions of Romanian language, history and geography. This intercultural model corresponds to the last model proposed by Nunan and Lam (1998) that also reflects minority language maintenance and it is the best to emphasize and enhance multilingual acquisition and use.

Large numbers of Romanian minority pupils in Spanish schools have spent a significant proportion of their lives in Spain and use everyday colloquial Spanish with ease. Many of these pupils may have reached a “plateau” in which they do not seem able to make further progress in Spanish. Current systems in education continue to identify such pupils as one-dimensional bilinguals speaking a minority language at home (Romanian) and with their Romanian counterparts whilst learning Spanish as school. These concepts may be little help for teachers in developing adequate teaching approaches and strategies.

Research studies since the early 1980s have shown that immigrant students can quickly acquire considerable fluency in the target language when they are exposed to it in the environment and at school, but also that despite this rapid growth in conversational fluency, it generally takes a minimum of about five years (and frequently much longer) for them to catch up with native speakers in academic aspects of the language.

2.2. Cross-linguistic transfer. A study focusing on the acquisition of English as a third language within the Romanian community.

The most relevant thing the three languages have in common is their shared Latin influence, which involves the factor of typological distance that has a beneficial effect for the Romanians living in Spain in the acquisition development of English as a foreign language.

While learning Spanish, the Romanian learners have two systems that can potentially influence each other ($L1 \longleftrightarrow L2$), when learning English two other bidirectional relationships can take place: the $L1$ can influence $L3$ and be influenced by $L3$ ($L1 \longleftrightarrow L3$) and cross-linguistic influence can also take place between the $L2$ and $L3$ ($L2 \longleftrightarrow L3$). Romanians learning English will rely on their knowledge

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of the other languages (their first native tongue and the Spanish language),the processes acquiring those languages and the strategies the learner used to acquire them, in order to compensate for the lexical, grammar, phonological, discourse gaps depending on the similarity between the structures of the two source languages.

The “interdependence hypothesis” relationship is expected to hold good in the case of multilingual acquisition, so that different degrees of proficiency in the first and second languages would affect the acquisition of the English as a third language (Cummins, 1981).

First of all, the three languages use the Roman alphabet. That knowledge helps build a phonemic and phonological foundation. An adult Romanian ESL student generally perceives that there is a great distance from Romanian to English, but a realization of how many words there are in common between current Romanian and English can offer a learner “a bridge” to the new language. The similarities discussed are based on a search for phonological and semantic resemblance. At the same time after acquiring Spanish as second language learning the lexical component involves even less endeavour as 30% to 40% of all words in English have a related word in Spanish.

Ringbom (1987) stresses the importance of similarity in phonology and semantics because students learn words more easily when they can attach a new word in their L3 to a word they know in their L1 or L2. Learners assume translation equivalence in order to make their job easier. Blum and Levenston come to the same conclusion, from observing the opposite phenomenon; they say that learners actually avoid words that have no semantic equivalent in the mother tongue.

Current communicative methods may frown on explicit teaching of similarities, but Cohen reminds us that learners search for equivalents and translate from the L3/ L2 no matter how much teachers preach against it, offering learners met language information about equivalents in lexical items simply makes it official. Learners use “hooks” no matter how many teachers try to avoid them in a communicatively based classroom. The popularity of the communicative method has left the “teaching” of specific linguistic information on the sidelines, but in order for FSL teachers to help students to recognize new L3 words, the teachers need to know the linguistic information themselves. Cohen and Aphek, reach the conclusion that learners cannot do it all on their own. As language learners, even fourth year language students, do not automatically recognize similarities which seem obvious to teachers, learners need to have these associations brought on their attention.

With similar sound, appearance and meaning, these cognates help students transfer that knowledge into their third knowledge, such similar English /Spanish pairings include invitación/ invitation, información/ information, insecto/insect, clase/ class and profesor/ professor. Since the Latin-

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derived words in English tend to be more formal, the Romanian student will benefit when reading academic text. He or she may sound too formal, however, if using such words in everyday spoken English. Conversely, phrasal verbs, which are an essential aspect of colloquial English are different for Romanian learners and may obstruct listening comprehension.

Long noun groups such as “the standard language classroom teacher-student interaction pattern, commonly found in academic English text, are troublesome for Romanian speakers, whose language as well as their second language post-modifies nouns. Romanian and Spanish have both a strong correspondence between the sound of a word and its spelling. The irregularity of English in this respect causes predictable problems when learners write a word they first meet in spoken language or say a word first met in written language. A specific problem concerns the spelling of English words with double letters. Romanian has only one double letter (cc) and Spanish has three double-letter combinations, (cc, ll, rr) English, in comparison, has five times as many.

Romanian learners find useful for learning English the word-formation patterns both languages share, such as foreign prefixes which are now nearly as numerous as those of native origin and are productive in forming nouns and adjectives (abiotic- Romanian abiotic, infrastructure- Romanian infrastructura), and suffixes as knowing the meaning of suffixes is important in both Romanian, and in English, because the suffixation is a highly productive process in language. (Incubation- Romanian incubatie, production- Romanian productie).

In analysing the lexical units of Romanian and English, we found that foreign loanwords do conform to a pattern; there are certain phonological patterns, including some one to one correspondences between individual letters, such as ecosystem: (Romanian ecosistem), turbine (Romanian turbine). Regarding the word order, Romanian and Spanish follow similar pattern (noun before adj.) while in English we have the adj. before noun, besides this issue sentences in all languages share the same basic structure, subject-verb-object (as compared to English and Chinese or other non-Latin derived languages), which will foster TLA.

Concerning the grammar aspect, although Romanian and Spanish are much more heavily inflected languages than English, there are many aspects of grammar that are similar. The major problem for the Romanian speaking Spanish learner is that there is no one to one correspondence in the use of the tenses. So, for example, a learner might incorrectly use a simple tense instead of a progression or a future one: ”She has a shower instead” of ”She is having a shower”, ”I help you after school”, and instead of ”I’ll help you after school”. Problematic for beginners is the formation of interrogative or negatives in English. The absence of an auxiliary in such structures in Spanish may cause learners

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to say: Why you say that? / Who he saw? / Do you saw him? There are minor differences in the three languages that may result in negative transfer. Here are a few examples and the way that things are done in Romanian and Spanish can be inferred from the mistake in English: Do you have sister? / It's not easy learn English / where's my pencil? When teachers and students become aware of these basic similarities between the two languages, it saves time and work as students transfer their knowledge of Spanish literacy into English literacy.

When acquiring English, the Romanian –Spanish speaker might be influenced by some differences between Spanish and English languages that may interfere with English pronunciation (phonemic difference) with decoding and spelling (phonological differences), and particularly in the aspects of vowel sounds and sentence stress. These are surpassed by the transfer from the Romanian alphabet that is nearly exactly as the English alphabet, except for five additional accented letters, or ‘diacriticals’: ă (like the ‘a’ in English word ‘musical’), ș (pronounced as ‘sh’), ț (pronounced ‘ts’), â, î (have the same reading, like a short ă). Perhaps the greatest difference between English and Spanish is that Spanish has only five pure vowel and five diphthongs and the length of the vowel is not significant in distinguishing between words. This contrasts with English which has 12 pure vowel sounds and 8 diphthongs. These differences are very serious obstacles to Spanish learners being able to acquire a native like English pronunciation. Speaker accent Coe (1987) says “European Spanish speakers, in particular, probably find English pronunciation harder than speakers of any other language” Additionally, in Spanish the pronunciation of each letter in the written word carries equal weight with every other letter. This means that each single vowel is always pronounced in the same way no matter what position it appears in. The varying pronunciation in English is a very frustrating concept since essentially each variation has to be memorized.

Moreover, producing English consonant sounds that might be problematic for many Spanish learners can be solved using Romanian because of different phonetic systems. They may have problems in the following aspects: failure to pronounce the end consonant accurately or strongly enough; e.g. “cart” for the English word “card”, problems with the /v/ in words such as “vowel” or “revive” difficulties in sufficiently distinguishing words such as see/she or jeep/sheep/cheap, the tendency to prefix words beginning with a consonant cluster on s-, for example school becomes school, “strip” becomes “estrip”, the swallowing of sounds on other consonant clusters; “next” becomes “nes”. There are some consonants that are absent from both Romanian and Spanish and can be best produced when demonstrated several times and practised both on their own and in words.

Using knowledge transfer from Romanian, stress is not a difficult matter to teach because like English, Romanian has secondary stresses in words that end in a vowel and last-syllable if it ends in a consonant. This is different from Spanish as is a syllable time language and when Spanish speakers transfer the intonation patterns of their mother tongue into English, which

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is stress-timed language, the result can be barely comprehensible to native English speakers. This is because the meaning or information usually conveyed in English by the combination of stress, pitch and rhythm in a sentence is flattened or evened out by the Spanish learner.

2.3. Proposals for further research

Several studies have analysed the beneficial influence of bilingualism on third language by comparing bilingual and monolingual learners acquiring a third language, which seem to call for a deeper focus of analyse in the case of the bilingual Romanian community learning English as a third language to better understand the process of cross linguistic influence and language processing.

Since so far no study in terms of linguistics has been conducted regarding the Romanian community living in Spain, and as all information reported in this project are mainly assumptions grounded on our theoretical knowledge on the topic, we consider that empirical studies would be obligatory in order to be able to draw more reliable research-based conclusions.

Therefore, it would interesting to observe in which way may be affected the process of cross-linguistic influence when the bilingual speaker Romanian/Spanish acquires English as a third language, in terms of a choice for a source language to transfer vocabulary, structures and pragmatic features taking into account that the second language (Spanish) seems to be typologically closer to the first language than to the target language. Moreover, further research is required so as to know if bilingual Romanians living in Spain out performance monolingual learners regarding the amount of pragmatic knowledge, the degree of pragmatic awareness and their competence in using different speech acts in interaction, as well as intercultural competence in English as a third language.

In the same line, it could be examined the effect of individual factors, such as level of bilingualism, the role of metalinguistic awareness, the role of L1 and L2 in various aspects of third language performance, level of proficiency, the educational background concerning the acquisition of their mother tongue formally through instructional sessions or only informally at home, social factors, motivation etc in the third language development. As the Romanian learners prefer to continue viewing TV programs subtitled but broadcasted in the original version, studies could be carried out to compare if bilingualism through Spanish positively affects the trilingual competence in English or this additional input has a direct consequence when producing the third language.

In light of all these variables further research is necessary to truly account for the role of bilingualism, considering all the variables in the learners' use of both language structures, in the development of trilinguals' language competence within the bilingual Romanians living in Spain and learning English as a foreign language.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This research proposal has focused on third language acquisition within the Romanian community living in Spain. The aim was to examine whether the learning of Spanish as a second language along the course of becoming bilingual speakers provides a beneficial influence in the process of acquiring English as a third language, and if it does in which way it is reflected in trilinguals' speakers competence. We tried to emphasize the similarities that exist between the two languages (L1&L2) and cultures, considering this parallel as a favorable factor that affects through positive transfer the achievement of bilingualism within learners.

In addition, this paper showed explicit information on cross-linguistic influence in learning English, and how the process and production of acquiring the Spanish language potentially influence the acquisition of the third language. We tried to reflect the compensatory performance phenomenon within the cross-linguistic transfer, drawing on their already acquired language systems, L1 and L2 for different linguistic structures and functions.

Results from our descriptive analysis indicate that these two language systems (L1 and L2) in contact contribute to enlarge speakers' linguistic repertoire which eventually results in a positive effect of the role of knowing two languages Romanian and Spanish, in the acquisition of English.

After examining all these issues we come to the conclusion that Romanians' experience and knowledge acquiring the Spanish language, definitely predicts in bilingual learners a clear advantage over monolingual learners, regarding various components of communicative competence of English language. However, since the only guarantee we have establishing the positive influence of bilingualism in the field of third language acquisition are the other studies conducted that proved that knowledge of more than one language influences the acquisition and use of a third one, and our personal beliefs, we should determine for sure to what extent this theory is relevant in this particular case, taking into account the large number of variables subjected to play a role in the studies.

Therefore, we have to carry out empirical studies to be able to conclude that our hypotheses are supported by valid results.

As Castellón province is a multicultural society and since there is the need to shed more light on this relatively young field of multilingualism, we need to meet the current needs for further research in third language acquisition within the newly established communities in order to better understand the development of those processes implied in multicultural acquisition and use.

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